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Author

Corporate Author United States Department of Health and Human Service

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HHS NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, August 24, 1981

Moses Newson - (202) 245-7204

HHS Secretary Richard S. Schweiker today announced that the first meeting of the expanded Agent Orange Working Group, which was elevated in July to Cabinet Council level by President Reagan, will be held Friday, Aug. 28 in Washington.

The expanded working group will guide and monitor all federal research into the possible adverse health effects of Agent Orange and similar chemicals on humans, with a particular focus on the health of Vietnam veterans. It will also continue to develop and organize means of conducting additional needed scientific research.

This will be its first meeting since President Reagan told national veterans organization leaders during a July White House meeting that "the full resources of the federal government are available to support the working group's continuing efforts."

In expressing his concern "over possible adverse health effects among Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange and other substances," President Reagan announced he had re-established the group, expanded it and raised its status to membership in the Cabinet Council on Human Resources.

Secretary Schweiker announced that James Stockdale, HHS deputy under secretary for intergovernmental affairs, will chair the working group of scientists, technical experts and policy-level officials from 11 federal departments and agencies.

He appointed Dr. Vernon N. Houk of the Center for Environmental Health, Centers for Disease Control, as chair of the group's science panel, and named

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Leslie A. Platt, HHS legal counsel, to continue as legal adviser and staff director.

HHS maintains its lead agency role in the expanded organization. The other departments and agencies are: Defense, Agriculture and Labor, and Veterans Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, ACTION, the Office of Management and Budget, the Council of Economic Advisers, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Office of Policy Development.

Also, the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment is being invited to continue as an observer and the General Accounting Office is being invited to advise and assist the group.

Before President Reagan re-established and expanded the working group, the Agriculture and Labor departments, the Environmental Protection Agency and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy had been observers. New members are ACTION, OMB, the Council of Economic Advisers and the White House Office of Policy Development.

Since December 1979, the working group has launched research efforts to find answers to many of the questions that have been raised about Agent Orange. These efforts include the birth defects study and the national registry of workers exposed to dioxin, both activities of the Centers for Disease Control; the Ranch Hand Study being conducted by the Air Force; and the epidemiological study planned by the Veterans Administration.

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